

MARY MAGDALEN.

VERSES ATTRIBUTED TO FRANCIS SCOTT KEY.
AUTHOR OF "STAR-SPANGLED BANNER."
To the hall of the feast came the sinful and fair,
For she heard in the city that Jesus was there;
She marked not the splendor that blazed on the board,
But silently knelt at the feet of her Lord.
The hair from her forehead, so sad and so meek,
Hung dark o'er the blushes that burned on her cheek;
Add so still and so lowly she knelt in her shame,
It seem'd like her spirit had flown from its frame.
The frown and the murmur went round thro' them all
That one so unhallo'd should tread in that hall,
And some said the poor would be objects more meet
For the wealth of the perfumes she shower'd on her feet.
She mark'd but her Saviour—she spoke but in sighs;
She dared not look up to the heaven of His eyes,
And the hot tears gush'd forth at each heave of her breast,
As her lips to His sandals she throbbingly pressed.
On the clouds after tempest as shined the bow,
In the glance of the sunbeam as melteth the snow,
He looked on that lost one—her sins were forgiven,
And Mary went forth in the beauty of heaven!

IN THE CONFESSIONAL.

From the French of Coppee by E. C. Waggoner.
One evening of the last winter the Abbe Faber, the worthy cure of the old church of Saint Medard, Paris, struggled against the furious blasts under a spread umbrella and painfully fought his way along the Rue Mouffetard on his road to the holy sanctuary. Very sure in his own mind that he was uselessly disturbing himself on this stormy night, he was deeply regretting the heap of blazing logs he had quitted in his little lodging in the Rue Lhomonde, also that Bollandist folio lying open upon the table by the side of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

But it was a Saturday evening, the day of all days when the old widows and the workwomen of his parish, who gained their living by cleaning in the neighborhood or collecting their little pensions, came to seek absolution from him in order to commune on the morrow. He could not, therefore, this honest priest, dispense with the necessity that required him to install himself in his oaken box and to open, like a prompt cashier, the wicket to his faithful flock. The confessional, as every one knows, is a kind of Paradise savings bank for the weekly depositing of venial sins.

The Abbe Faber was all the more averse to going out on this special Saturday evening because it was the weekly pay-day of all the world, and generally, at such times, the Rue Mouffetard was an anti-hill of people, and of people but ill disposed to the priestly soutine. It was good to be a man of God, "a holy man," as his parishioners called him, but the Abbe Faber did not find it the less displeasing to lower his eyes before painful sights or to have in his ears the oaths and foul language caught in passing.

There was, moreover, a certain liquor shop which the good Abbe particularly detested, a shop all red and aflame with gas jets, sending out hot and alcoholic odors through its open door, and with row upon row of cases and barrels ornamented with placards, labeled "Absinthe," "Bitters," "Madeira," "Vermouth," "Eau de Vie," while upright before the counter a band of drinkers in cap and blouse saluted him as he filed along the payments with a "Here! Here! Your Holiness!" distinctly offensive.

This evening, however, the bad weather had made the streets deserted, and the Abbe arrived at the threshold of the church without disturbance, dipped his fingers in the waiting benediction, made the sign of the cross, and with a brief reverence to the main altar turned his face in the direction of the confessional.

No, it was not for nothing that he had come out in the wind and rain—a penitent was there before him.

A male penitent! A most rare and infrequent visitor to the confessional of Saint Medard! But this time it was no illusion of the senses with the worthy Abbe, he saw him plainly under the red light of the lamp swinging from the nave of the chapel, and still more clearly the short white blouse and the nail-studded sandals of this kneeling man.

Some workman, doubtless, who had kept his simple peasant's faith and the proper habits of a practical religion. Nevertheless, and of this the Abbe Faber was very sure, the confession he was going to hear would be like all the others, as commonplace as that of the cook of the Rue de la Monge, who accused herself of padding the bottom of her baskets, but did not dream of restitution.

The priest even smiled a little as he recalled the usual formula of the young faubourgeois who came to demand a billet of confession preparatory to marriage on the morrow:

"I have not killed, I have not stolen; as for the rest, my Father, question me!"

Naturally the Abbe Faber passed into his box with peaceful tranquillity, and with no other emotion drew aside the little curtain of green serge that screened the wicket.

"M. le Cure," began a deep voice that sought in vain to soften the harshness of its tone, "M. le Cure—"

"I am no longer a cure, my friend," murmured the Abbe in return, "begin with your confessor and call me 'my Father.'"

The kneeling figure, whose face, bathed in shadow, the Abbe was unable to see, obeyed instructions, stumbled through the prayer which he seemed to find difficulty in recalling, and then, after a moment's silence and as if struggling with some strange emotion, commenced his confession.

"Pardon me, M. le Cure," said he, "my Father, I should say, if I do not speak as I should, but it is twenty years since I knelt in the confessional. You know how it is with a man in Paris and who is not bad like the others. I told myself that God knows all; I need not go. But to-day, to-night, M. le Cure, I have that upon my conscience too heavy to bear alone. I have come, then, to you—you must share it with me, this burden, for—I have killed a man!"

Killed a man! The Abbe started upon his stool. A murderer, this man before him! Then there would be no more distractions of mind for him during the coming self-unburdening! No more listening with distrust ear to the foolish babbling of old women, too zealous in self-accu-

sations, and whom he could absolve with speed and confidence! The brow so near his own had conceived and executed a crime! Those hands joined upon the confessional were red with blood!—were perhaps still soiled with it as it had run from the veins of his victim!

And in the horror that assailed the Abbe Faber as the penitent spoke there was possibly a little terror, for he could find no words in which to respond but the conventional—

"Confess, confess, my son; the mercy of God is infinite."

"Well, listen to my story," said the man, his voice vibrating, and harsher than ever in its hopeless sorrow:

"By trade I am a mason, a layer of brick and stone, and came to Paris at twenty years of age with a friend and companion of my childhood and from my own village. We lived together and learned to read together at the public schools. He was called Philippe and was more than a brother to me, and I am called Jacques. He was also tall, handsome, a good worker, and carried his heart in his hand. I, on the contrary, was heavy, dull, not even as good a mason as Philippe, yet so proud of having such a friend, so glad to walk beside him in the boulevards and to have him clap me on the back and call me his 'great stupid.' In short, I loved him, and though he left me three-quarters of the time to go and amuse himself with his comrades in the cafes I still loved him.

"It was natural at his age; he was happy and liked pleasure; he was free, with no cares to worry him, and I was not free—I was forced to be saving, for I had an old and infirm mother in my village home who needed all I could give her. It was for this I first began to take my meals with a woman who lived in the same house with me and made her living by furnishing the *pot-au-feu* for all the masons.

"Philippe did not do this, but ate elsewhere, and I remained, perhaps for another reason—I loved the daughter of the household, loved her madly. Poor Catherine! and you will see presently, M. le Cure, to what all this is coming. I lived there for three years without telling her of my love for her. I was too poor, too indifferent a worker, and scarcely earned sufficient to care for myself and my mother. When she left me for heaven, for she was a good and pious woman, I did better—I saved a little money—enough, it seemed to me, to start a household. I spoke to Catherine, and at first she said neither yes nor no.

"Parbleu! I was not attractive—I see it now, and I did not until her mother, who liked me well, talked on my side that our marriage was finally agreed upon. Ah, M. le Cure, I spent then some happy weeks, though I feared that Catherine had only accepted me and did not love me. But she was a good girl, with a good heart, and I meant to wait—I loved her so much she would surely love me.

"Of course I had told Philippe, whom I saw every day upon the scaffolding—we were then employed by the same patron—told him, I say, everything. The result, M. le Cure, you have doubtless divined. Philippe was a handsome man, gay, free-handed, everything, in short, that I was not, and soon, without either of them intending it, Catherine was made about him. She was a good girl, as I've told you, and she told me of it as soon as she knew it herself. All the same, I shall never forget that moment.

"Ah, well, I loved them, loved them both, M. le Cure, and believed it would be for their happiness. Philippe had always made a good salary, but had saved nothing. I gave him my savings; he purchased furniture, and they were married. Everything at first went well, and there was one child, a boy, named Camille, and I was the godfather; it was after the birth of the child that things began to go wrong. I had been mistaken—Philippe was not meant for marriage; he loved pleasure and gay company too much. You, who spend your life among the poor, M. le Cure, know by heart this sad history; in the beginning the worker who little by little glides into idleness, drunkenness, and absences of two or three days; then who reports only at the end of a week, makes a scene, and ends by beating his wife. In less than two years Philippe had become one of these unfortunates.

"In the beginning I sought to stop him—to correct him; my remonstrances only made him more furious, separated us, and stripped the household for the furnishing of the Monte de Piete all the faster. One night he had the shamelessness to make me a shameless proposal—of his own wife, too, that poor, pale Catherine, as honest as the Holy Virgin. There was a scene between us, accusations and insults, heaped upon us both by this drunken fool. I struck him, and—renounced even seeing Catherine and my godson. Philippe I only saw when we chanced to meet (which, as he worked but little, was infrequently) on the same building.

"Still I loved them all too well to lose them from sight; yet I could only prowl the quarter on Saturday nights when Philippe had gone to drink up the wages he had just received, and if there was too much misery in the household, which I learned by listening to the gossip, doing what I could to relieve it. Philippe, the shameless, discovered this, and, finding that I would still come to the aid of his wife and child, found it very agreeable.

"To abridge—years passed thus, Philippe ever sinking deeper and deeper into vice, but Catherine, with my help, had been able to bring up her son as brave, honest, and true as herself, though not as a mason, a worker, like me. No, he was a scholar, a designer, a pupil of the night schools, who was able to earn a good salary in an architect's office. He was good to his mother as well, and to see her on the arm of this kind son paid me for everything.

"But yesterday evening, in coming from the cook shop, I encountered Camille alone, and as he gave me his hand—he is not too proud, M. le Cure, to do even that—I saw by something in his face that all was not right with him. I questioned him.

"I have drawn," he responded, 'a bad number—one of those that will send me to the colonies as a marine for five years at least, and I leave my mother without resources, and with my father, who has never drank as he drinks now, or been so wicked. Poor people are certainly accused!'

"Ah! M. le Cure, the horrible night I have passed! The twenty years' efforts of this poor mother destroyed in a single instant by the turn of a chance! the simple rummaging of a hand in a sack! the withdrawing of a lettered scrap!

"It was barely daylight when I arose this morning and returned to the building which I am helping to construct on the boulevard Arago. Work is the only relief for suffering, and I climbed to my place—the walls are already to

the fourth story—and began to lay the bricks. Suddenly a hand touched my shoulder; I turned; it was Philippe, working to-day through a caprice, and the patron, under contract for a certain time, had accepted him—the first comer.

"I had not seen Philippe until this morning for a long, long while, and I had difficulty to recognize him. Burned and withered away by *eau de vie*, with gray hair and shaking hands, he was an old man, a hideous and bloated ruin.

"And so," I said to him, for my heart was full, 'the lad has drawn a bad number!'

"A bad number, you say?' he repeated in a rough voice and with a wicked look, 'and why a bad number, pray? Are you, too, as stupid as the rest—as mother and son? Camille should serve his country as the others serve her, though I know very well what it is that both of them wish; if I was dead, you see, and he leered at me with a hideous grin on his bloated lips, 'if I was dead, he wouldn't go. But—and so the worse for them—I'm solid as a post still, and Camille is not the son of a widow!'

"The son of a widow! Ah-h, M. le Cure, why did he say those words before me—in that spot of all others? I, whom he had outraged in every way, whom he had made to suffer so much, and who still suffered so much under the suffering he inflicted upon others? Like a flash a bad thought came into my mind—a thought that stayed with me all day long as side by side I worked with this man! That poor Catherine—what torture he would inflict upon her when she had no longer a son to protect her against a miserable drunkard, always ugly, always evil under the lash of liquor, and capable of being more!

"Four o'clock struck and I was still thinking of this; then 5 o'clock, then 5:30. The men had all descended; Philippe and I were the last to start, and in the very act of disappearing in his turn he stopped an instant to look above him and to say—God knows what possessed him—to say with a sneer that was simply devilish:

"I have always a sailor's foot, you see; Camille isn't near to being the son of a widow!'

"M. le Cure, for a moment I was mad with anger and revolt at the fate which this man had drawn upon us all. I had only to stretch out a hand to end everything—only to seize the ladder to which Philippe clung and to send it whirling into space; I had only to do this, I say, and M. le Cure—I did it!

"He was stone dead when they picked him up. There was no one to say it was not an accident, and Camille, well, Camille is the son of a widow now, and he will not go! It is I who will go, who will emigrate to America, for I dare not stay!

"I have told the truth to you and to the good God, and I repent, but should I stay and see Catherine in her black robe, and so happy and proud on the arm of her son, her own, at last, I know that I should repent no longer—that I should cease to regret my bad action.

"As for a penance, M. le Cure, take you this, a golden trinket I bought for Catherine when she should be my wife, and which I have always treasured. Sell it now, and divide the money among the poor!"

Did Jacques rise up absolved of his sin by the Abbe Faber? Who knows? But that which is certain is this—the priest did not sell the golden trinket given him by the hand of a murderer under the seal and shadow of the confessional. He turned the price of it, or as near it as he could guess, into the coffers of the church, but he suspended it like an *ex voto* upon the altar of the Chapel of the Virgin, before which he daily prays for the soul of the poor mason.

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BIG STORMS IN HISTORY.

Some That Throw the Louisville Disaster Into the Shade.

From the New York Sun.

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